DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 168 096 CS 502 451

AUTHOR Falcione, Raymond L.
TITLE The Communication Consultant in Organizational Settings.
PUB DATE Nov 78
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (64th, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 2-5, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Communication; *Change Strategies; *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Communication Problems; *Consultants; *Organizational Communication

ABSTRACT

The organizational communication specialist can play a significant role in the communication of change. The consultant must begin by determining who the client is and what the unit of change is to be. Then the consultant must choose which intervention is appropriate and what the focal issue is. Before the consultation, the consultant and client must agree on certain considerations including what changes will occur, clarification of responsibilities, and a timetable. The audit process is one intervention that fits an action research model of organizational development and accomplishes the following: measures information flow, message content, and communicator attitudes; provides attitudinal, perceptual, and behavioral data; and allows for organizational comparisons. Follow-up should assure that management is held accountable for action taken to increase the effectiveness of the organization and should include training others to use some of the consultant's skills. Whatever strategy a consultant uses, it should be purposeful, task-specific, integrated, temporal, adaptable, agreed to by the client, and cost-effective. (TJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED168096

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

The Communication Consultant in Organizational Settings

by

Raymond L. Falcione, Ph.D.
University of Maryland

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Raymond L. Falcione

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

Paper presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November, 1978.

CS502451

The broad field of organizational development is concerned to large degree, with change. The field is predominantly interested in the dynamic nature of organizations and the systematic implementations of change. As organizations become more complex internally, their survival becomes more a function of their ability to cope with change in the nature, location, and availability of jobs; and change in relationships between people in the attempt to accomplish organizational goals. The external demands placed on organizations also increase the need for systematic change. Increased governmental controls, pressures from citizens groups, new legislation, environmentalist and consumer groups, and union demands are some of the pressures from the external environment.

The organizational communication specialist can play a significant role in the "Communication of Change" in organizations by using many of the same techniques employed by organizational development practioners.

The purpose of this paper is to (1) establish parameters for the units of change, focal issues, and the types of intervention modes applicable to organizations; (2) pre-entry considerations; (3) diagnostic and feedback techniques; and (4) follow-up and implementation of change strategies.

Units of Change (Client System)

The communication consultant must determine who the client is before he/she can intervene in the system. This is extremely important to effective consulting. Often, the individual who initiates contact and asks for your help, is not the real client. One of the first issues to be addressed

in the initial consultant/client negotiations is the mutual agreement of the unit of change. They can range from a micro to a macro perspective:

Micro	Individual
	Group
	Intergroup
	Organization-Wide
Macro	Larger Social System

The consultant must continually ask himself if the real client is being dealt with, and must be willing to re-define the client if necessary.

Types of Interventions

A knowledge of the unit(s) of change provides the consultant with insight concerning the viability of various intervention modes. Blake and Mouton (1976) have presented five main types of interventions which consultants can use in the organizational context, and I have added one additional mode considered to be pertinent. They are:

Acceptant - Helping the client to "sort out" feelings and perceptions without fear of rejection or evaluation reactions from the consultant. Active listening techniques are the essential tools of the consultant in this intervention mode. The consultant allows for catharsis to occur, while responding empathically to the client.

Catalytic - Assisting the client by collecting data, and using it for feedback and reinterpretation of system dynamics. This intervention is extremely applicable for the communication consultant because it provides the client with new information surrounding problem areas. It is essentially a data-based intervention which helps the client perceive the environment differently.

Prescription - Telling the client what he or she should do to rectify the problem. The consultant assumes the responsibility of diagnosis and solution for the client.

Confrontation - Challenging the client to examine how his thinking or perception may be distorted. The consultant in a tentative manner points inconsistencies noticed.

Theories & Principles - Offering theories which pertain to the client's problem. The consultant helps the client to internalize empirically verified theory about organizational behavior. The client, in turn, is hopefully in a better position to diagnose problem areas and develop alternate plans of action for present and future problems.

Skill Development - The consultant facilitates various experience-based skill building activities, usually in a workshop setting. Hopefully, the client internalizes new, more effective behavioral skills in managing his/her environment.

It is important to note that the above intervention modes are "pure" types, but should be viewed as interdependent as well. It has been my experience that the effective consultant is one who can easily move from one mode to another as the situation dictates. Therefore, an effective communication consultant must possess a functional, broad-based repertoire of helping skills, diagnostic skills, and confrontation skills, plus a sound understanding of organizational theory and behavior. The communication consultant who possesses less than the above will not be very effective overall.

Focal Issues

The consultant's understanding of the units of change and the most appropriate intervention mode to employ is only part of the picture. Another dimension the consultant must consider is the focal issue being addressed. Blake and Mouton (1976) have presented four focal issues which can be very helpful to the consultant. They suggest that organizational problems can generally be isolated among certain issues: (1) power/authority; (2) morale/cohesion; (3) norms/standards; and (4) goals/objectives. These focal issues can be extremely functional in the isolation of problems, causes, and solutions.

Although the above four focal issues are helpful to the consultant in

diagnosis, I feel another issue should be included in Blake and Mouton's model. Information flow-diffusion processes is a focal issue particularly relevant for the communication consultant. In other words, are people getting the information they need to do their jobs? How effectively is information about major or minor change programs diffused within the system? These types of questions are extremely important to the consultant who is concerned about organizational effectiveness and particularly about the "communication of change." Figure 1 illustrates the units of change, intervention modes, and focal issues.

Pre-Entry Considerations

Before the communication consultant can perform a consultation with a potential client, he/she needs to deal with certain pre-entry considerations. The purpose of this section is to present a brief overview of those concerns.

1. Before establishing the client-consultant relationship, it's important to clarify the need for change. It is necessary for the consultant to actively listen to the potential client's perceptions of the problem. The potential client's felt need may be distorted as well as his perception of what the consultant's role should be.

2. Mutual expectations need to be clarified between the consultant and the potential client. Depending on the nature of the intervention, the potential client should become cognizant of his ability and readiness to devote time and energy toward planned change.

3. Be sure the potential client realizes that you are not working for him, but for his organization. It should be clear from the beginning that your consultancy goal is to increase organizational effectiveness, not to further the personal objectives of the potential client.

4. Do you feel you can work with the client? The compatability of the relationship, perceived credibility, and the degree of mutual commitment

are important factors in a successful consultation.

5. What kinds of outcomes are going to occur from the consultation? In other words, based on our mutual expectations, what changes will occur in the organization as a consequence of the consultation effort.

6. Clarification of responsibilities is an important consideration. How much involvement should top management have? How much internal support will be needed? What kind of support? What are the time and energy requirements? Who pays the bill? Is there clear agreement about cost factors?

7. A timetable of events, outcomes, and accountability should be pre-determined before entering the organization.

The above 7 pre-entry concerns should be viewed as minimal considerations before entering a client system. I find that a viable contract should include information under the following areas:

I. Objectives
II. Procedures
III. Responsibilities
IV. Timetable
V. Cost Estimate

An effectively written contract can save a good deal of anxiety for both the consultant and client, and is worth spending considerable time in its development.

Diagnostic and Feedback Techniques

The purpose of this section is to briefly describe the communication "audit" process developed by more than 100 Division IV (organizational communication) members of the International Communication Association (ICA) under the direction of Dr. Gerald M. Goldhaber. The audit process appears to be an ideal technique to describe since it utilizes the major diagnostic methods normally employed by consultants in organizations.

Furthermore, the audit process is a viable catalytic intervention which appropriately fits an action research model of organizational development. The audit process will be described within the context of the action research model.

The Communication Audit

The audit process developed under the auspices of the ICA is a unique diagnostic system which accomplishes the following:

1. measures information flow, message content, communicator attitudes and perception of both.
2. provides attitudinal, perceptual and behavioral data.
3. uses a variety of diagnostic techniques, allowing for any combination of instruments to be used in data-gathering.
4. uses standardized procedures for data collection and analysis.
5. allows for organizational comparisons by norming audit data.
6. allows for limited organizational input to customize the instruments and administration procedures without disrupting the standardization needed for organizational comparisons.
7. uses original computer programs for data analysis and feedback.

Diagnostic Instruments

The audit process employs five diagnostic instruments which can be administered independently or in any combination. For the purposes of this paper, I will describe the three instruments I consider most applicable for the communication consultant:

1. Survey Questionnaire - Consists of 116 items and 10 demographics plus up to 34 questions of any type determined by the client organization. The survey allows respondents to indicate their perceptions of the current status of their communication system as well as their desired or ideal status. The disparity between the two helps in the identification of the organization's communication needs. Depending on the direction of the disparity, information overload or underload can be identified.

   Besides measuring the amount of information in the system, the survey also evaluates the quality of information, communication relationships, and assesses overall job satisfaction.

   The survey diagnoses eight topic areas:

   1. Receiving Information
   2. Sending Information
   3. Follow-Up
   4. Sources of Information
   5. Quality of Information Sources
   6. Channels of Information
   7. Communication Relationship
   8. Organizational Outcomes

   An organizational profile of perceptions of communication events, practices and relationships can be developed within each of the above topic areas. These profiles can be further analyzed according to such demographics as age, sex, education, employee level, by department, division or any other meaningful combination.

2. Interviews - Randomly and/or purposively selected members of the organization are asked to participate in dyadic interviews. The primary purpose is to corroborate and/or expand on concerns reported in the survey. Most interviews last approximately one hour or more, and are conducted confidentially. (See Figure 2.)

3. Communication Experiences - Employed as an integral part of the survey questionnaire, respondents describe critical

communication episodes which they feel are representative of successful or unsuccessful incidents. Forms are provided after each topic area section of the survey. From these incidents, the consultant gets a better understanding of why a given unit or department is perceiving communication problems. This qualitative information adds richness to the data derived from the survey.

The communication consultant who uses the audit as a catalytic intervention should apply its use to the Action Research Model shown below. For if the organization is committed to change, description and recommendations are insufficient.

Action Research Model

1. Problem Felt by Client
2. Audit Conceived with organizational liaison group
3. Audit Introduced to those to be involved and modified where necessary
4. Data Gathered
5. Data Analyzed and Collated
6. Follow-Up Interviews
7. Data Feedback Meeting - data clarified, expanded, problems identified
8. Action Planning
9. Action Taken
10. Follow-Up

Feeback Loop - Recycle Process if Necessary

Follow-Up and Implementation of Change Strategies

Feeding back data to organizational members isn't usually enough for an effective catalytic intervention. Management should be held accountable for action taken to increase the effectiveness of the organization. Unless the accountability structure changes there will be little or no change.

There are a few considerations worth mentioning which will usually increase the organization's committment to action and change:

1. Everyone should get what the boss gets. All respondents should receive the results of the diagnosis. The fosters a commitment to action.
2. There should be an active, on-going involvement of key organizational members throughout the process.
3. The consultant, using the full range of intervention modes, should make every effort to transfer his/her skills and knowledge to those internal members of the organizational system.

When the consultant is willing to share his/her skills, it increases the manager's capabilities to integrate the social and technical processes. At this stage in the consultation, the consultant should be primarily concerned with processes. Now that the data has been collected and analyzed the need for education and training in process events becomes essential. Process events surround the focal issues of Power/Authority, Morale/Cohesion, Norms/Standards, Goals/Objectives, and Information Flow/Diffusion. In essence, the consultant becomes a process consultant with the objective of helping the client(s) to perceive, understand, and effectively act upon the new data generated from the diagnosis.

An elaborate description of the various change strategies available, would go beyond the limitations of this paper. Therefore, a short description

of some of the more representative strategies will be covered:

1. Team skills training - experiential simulations which develop more effective communication skills, problem-solving, decision-making, etc.
2. Team building - working with natural work groups, ideally, starting with the top management groups and working down through the organization. The natural work groups identify the areas which diminish their effectiveness and design new processes and action plans for improvement.
3. Intergroup building - working with natural groups for the purpose of developing mutual understanding, cooperation. Specific action plans are developed so that the groups can aid each other's effectiveness.
4. Open-Systems Planning - the management group aggressively searches for and develops system-wide change strategies (Bechard and Harris, 1977). The following steps are used:
    a. Determine the "core mission" of the organization;
    b. Map the demand system;
    c. Map the current response system;
    d. Project the probable demand system;
    e. Identify the desired state;
    f. List activities necessary to achieve the desired state;
    g. Define cost-effective options.

There are many more strategies available to the communication consultant. Whatever method is chosen is largely a function of individual preference and the situational constraints. Bechard and Harris (1977) offer some good advice in developing an effective "process plan." They feel it should possess the following characteristics:

1. It is purposeful - the activities are clearly linked to the change goals and priorities;
2. It is task-specific - the types of activities involved are clearly identified rather than broadly generalized;
3. It is integrated - the discrete activities are linked;
4. It is temporal - it is time-sequenced;
5. It is adaptable - there are contingency plans and ways of adapting to unexpected forces;
6. It is agreed to by the top of the organization;
7. It is cost-effective in terms of the investment of both time and people.

In this paper, I have briefly summarized some of the considerations and interventions strategies which may be useful to the communication consultant in organizations. Successful organizational change efforts require skilled professionals who have competencies in both organizational theory and behavior as well as communication processes.

References

Bechard, R. and Harris, R. T., Organizational Transitions: Managing Complex Change. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1977.

Blake, K. and Mouton, J. S., Consultation. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1976.

Goldhaber, G. "The ICA Communication Audit: Rationale and Development," Unpublished manuscript delivered to the Academy of Management Convention in Kansas City, 1976.

Figure 1

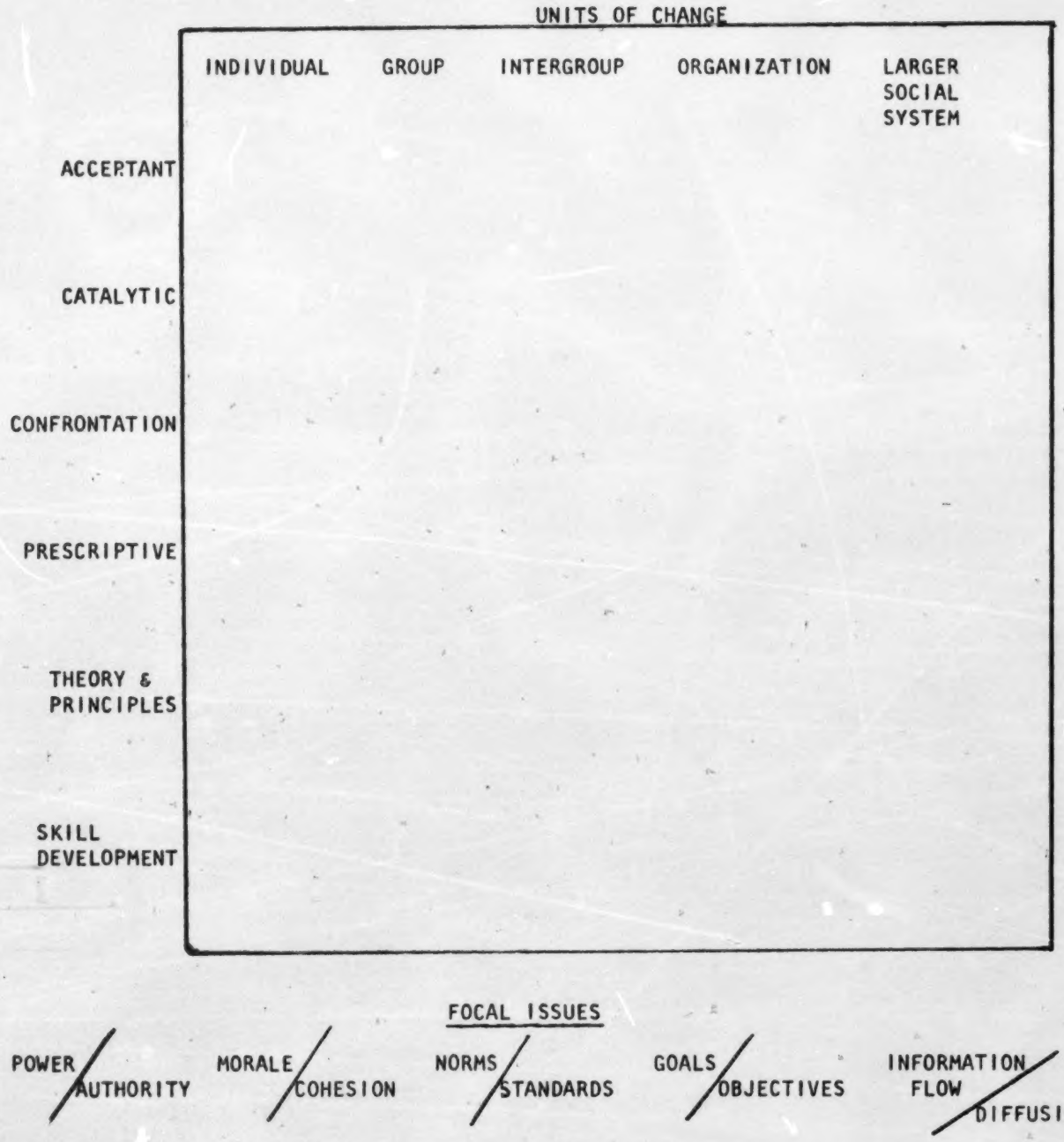
UNITS OF CHANGE
INDIVIDUAL
GROUP
INTERGROUP
ORGANIZATION
LARGER SOCIAL SYSTEM
ACCEPTANT
CATALYTIC
CONFRONTATION
PRESCRIPTIVE
THEORY & PRINCIPLES
SKILL DEVELOPMENT
FOCAL ISSUES
POWER / AUTHORITY
MORALE / COHESION
NORMS / STANDARDS
GOALS / OBJECTIVES
INFORMATION FLOW / DIFFUSION

Figure 2

EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW

1. Describe your job (duties, function). What decisions do you usually make in your job? What information do you need to make those decisions? What information do you get to make those decisions? Are there formal (written) or informal policies in your organization which determine how you get this information? Should any policies be added, changed, abandoned?

2. What are the major communication strengths of this organization? Be specific. (Begin with the larger system and work down to his/her work unit.)

3. What are the major communication weaknesses of this organization? Be specific. (Again, begin with the larger system and work down.)

4. Describe the formal channels through which you typically receive information about this organization. What kinds of information do you tend to receive? How often?

5. Describe the informal channels through which you typically receive information about this organization. What kinds of information do you tend to receive? How often?

6. How often, if ever, do you receive information about this organization which is of low value or use to you? If and when you do, what kinds of information do you receive? Be specific. From whom do you receive this?

7. What would you like to see done to improve communication in this organization? Why hasn't it been done yet?

8. Describe the way decisions are typically made in this organization?

9. When conflict occurs in this organization, what is its major cause? How is conflict typically resolved?

10. Describe the communication relationship you have with: your immediate supervisor? your co-workers? middle management? top management? your subordinates (if appropriate)? (Ask for specific examples of behavioral evidence of trust, openness--"How do you know that he/she trusts you?" "What has he/she done to indicate that they are being open and frank with you?", etc.)

11. How do you know when this organization has done a good or bad job toward accomplishing its goals? What measures of effectiveness are used in this organization?

12. Is there anything else you would like to talk with me about? Is there some other person (or group of people) with whom you think I should talk to?

Record: Interviewer name; interviewee name; data; time; location and length of interview; interviewer subjective reactions to interviewee and interview.